

Victory Lap or Humble Ride

March 30, 2017

This spring Premier Pallister is initiating a campaign to thank Indigenous people, particularly the Indigenous groups along the Red River, with the recognition of 1817 Selkirk Treaty. Two hundred years ago, a treaty was made with colonists and the Indigenous people to make way for access to land for settlement. The treaty was also an affirmation of the relationship between Selkirk colonists and Peguis. It was Peguis that provided assistance to the colonists when they encountered harsh times during their arrival to the area. In this vein, the commemoration is being made to acknowledge to Indigenous people in Manitoba.

Although with the recent criticisms on harvesting rights, inflections of ignorant comments that are targeted to the very people this tour is acknowledging, as a provincial leader he can step it up with a little more reconciliation action to strive for equity in this province. It is hard to see this bike tour as an acknowledgement to Indigenous peoples in Manitoba. It feels more like a taunting towards Indigenous people in the province.

Perhaps it is a way to increase awareness of Indigenous contributions to Manitoba, after all the buffalo is on the provincial crest, provincial flag and institutions. The buffalo along with others is highly regarded in our ceremonies it provided food, clothing, shelter, and tools. It would give its life for our survival. The buffalo disappeared during the time of influx of settlers coming to the area and we do see them anymore.

In the early 1800's, the Red River area was a stomping ground of activity, fur traders and settlers flooded the area for settlement and access to land to make a life. Throughout the region, there have been a number of different groups that were jockeying to maintain a position of privilege with the territory's resources. Since the late 1600's, it was claimed Rupertsland under King Charles II of England and he established the Hudson Bay Company. As resources and land were being used up by more and more from settlers coming to the area, missionaries were on task to extricate Indigenous spiritual foundations and to assimilate the Indigenous people at the same time.

When the Selkirk Treaty of 1817 was signed, the St. Peters Indian Reserve was created. It provided a place for the band to live as more people came to the area and settlements were being formed around the community. This area of Red River has been used by the Indigenous groups for years, prior to the 1600's and in the 1780's Peguis occupied the Red River area until treaties were made. Eventually the original inhabitants would be removed from their homelands, again to make way for settlement of Manitoba. In 1905, the St. Peters Reserve was illegally surrendered to make way for settlement in the area, residents traveled by boat, horse and wagon and train to Oshki – ishkonigan (Peguis) to make a life and to begin anew.

The Premier will be delivering letters of thanks along a route from original Peguis to the new reserve in June to acknowledge participation of Peguis and his role in the formation of Manitoba. Throughout the history of Manitoba, there has been no equity for the original inhabitants of this land, and often have

been taken advantage of by policies and regulations created without our involvement and we have had to survive and make do with what we can to provide for our families. The creation of Manitoba and the signing of the treaties (treaty 1) resulted in a confounding relationship with province. It is more of a political debate around jurisdiction of fiduciary responsibility and I believe the elected leader of the province can do more to make acknowledgement to the Indigenous people in the province.

The provincial leader can step up and make true stand for Indigenous peoples in Manitoba, be a leader in Indigenous relations. He can work with Indigenous health leaders and prepare a plan to work together and supporting Indigenous health frameworks. He can work with Indigenous leaders and harvesters to conserve land and resources. He can work with Indigenous leaders to ensure equitable participation in provincial infrastructure programs and social programs. What I am getting at is there is more meaningful ways to reconcile with Indigenous peoples of Manitoba other than a bike ride.

There have been a number of reports and inquiries conducted that attribute recommendations to equate Indigenous relations in Manitoba and Canada, more recently the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, Calls to Action. The premier can reflect on these and find improvements to current policies and legislation affecting Indigenous people in the province. Manitoba has the highest population of aboriginal people in Canada. Almost half of them live off reserve in cities and rural municipalities. It is his duty to find resolve in partnership with indigenous people in Manitoba.

I have been advocating for food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples in Manitoba and raising awareness for increased support to initiatives. There are opportunities for the province to participate in supporting Indigenous communities and people for more equitable health and wellbeing within this field. It is the Selkirk Treaty that put the people on reserves and restricted movement on the land, from which our lives depended on for health and a good life. It is also within food sovereignty that harvesting rights can be upheld and strengthened with co management regimes for conservation of land and resources with Indigenous peoples. Creating increased access to traditional foods outside of reserves can lead to better health outcomes for people living off reserve. These small steps can be effective in the long term for a more equitable province, a true impression towards reconciliation in Manitoba.

With the letters of thanks from Manitobans, it is hoped the premier learns the true history of Manitoba and the sacrifices made by the Indigenous peoples. I hope the letters will move him to actual reconciliation work in the province and to partner with Indigenous people. I have mentioned the disappearance of buffalo earlier, maybe we can raise the provincial emblem and bring back the buffalo.

Tim Stevenson is a member of Peguis First Nation and does research on Indigenous food sovereignty